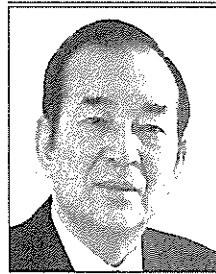


Era of global antiglobalization at hand

European countries, including France, which is scheduled to hold a presidential election in 2017, continue to be alarmed at Republican Donald Trump's victory in the recent U.S. presidential election because his election is giving impetus to the surge of far-right demagogic politics in Europe.

Those who are taken aback by the new U.S. political



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By Masayuki Yamauchi

landscape fear that Trump's "apocalyptic" views will spread to Italy and other European countries as a product of "limitless super-liberalism." As such, as French President Francois Hollande has mentioned, a new age of uncertainty may have already begun.

Nonetheless, while Trump's election campaign can be seen as a theater of populism, the president-elect's political convictions do not seem to embrace a far-right ideology similar to the one that resulted in the eruption of McCarthyism, the ruthless anticommunist campaign led by U.S. Sen. Joseph McCarthy in the early years of the Cold War.

In the first place, because France has a multiparty system, unlike the United States, where Congress is dominated by two major parties, the far-right National Front party is unlikely to replicate the Trump phenomenon in the forthcoming presidential election. In that race, scheduled for April 23, no candidate is expected to win an outright majority, compelling the French electorate to choose between the top two candidates in a runoff on May 7, as in all the previous races since 1965.

In such a decisive election round, a candidate backed by a coalition of center-right and right-wing parties, which will join hands in confronting the far-right National Front, is likely to be sufficiently backed by hard-line supporters of the parties on the left, a development that did not happen in the U.S. presidential election.

What the shock of Trump's victory means to Japan differs from what it means to the European member states of the Group of Seven nations. For Japan, Trump's triumph is important in terms of whether it will affect the Japan-U.S. alliance in general and the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty in particular. But his victory is unlikely to arouse populism in Japan's domestic political sphere.

In Europe, Trump's win, coupled with the British electorate's vote to leave the European Union, has greatly fueled the growth of populism and affected the way people vote. Moreover, the EU is not capable of taking over the leadership from the United States in dealing with the issues in Ukraine and the Middle East — the areas to which Trump wants Washington to be less committed.

Besides lacking the military capabilities to deal with the

ongoing problems in the Middle East, including the Syrian civil war, the EU has allowed the wave of populism within it to transform the refugee crisis — the greatest challenge in today's Europe — into one that is seemingly beyond a solution.

On Dec. 11, bomb attacks killed 38 people in Istanbul and another 25 in Cairo. It is feared these terrorist campaigns will further simultaneously complicate the multiple crises involving both the Middle East and Europe, accelerating the swell of populist sentiment against Islam and refugees.

'America first' threats

Meanwhile, based on his populist "America first" doctrine, Trump threatens to let the United States evade its post-Cold War responsibility for facilitating the expansion of free trade in the world and globalization. For example, he has already said the United States will quit the Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade agreement on his first day in the White House.

Trump's victory may portend the spread of a contagion in the world of the "globalization of antiglobalization,"

which is an extension of the populist symptom that came to the fore in June's Brexit referendum. I expect the U.S. policy toward the Middle East will become the most symbolic embodiment of Trump's "America first" policy.

A decision to reduce both U.S. casualties and military spending in the Middle East will certainly be applauded by his populist supporters, who want to see an increase in jobs at home. Since August 2014 when the militant group the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) captured parts of Syria and Iraq, the U.S. government has spent a total of \$9 billion — \$12 million per day — on the fight against ISIL.

Trump and Barack Obama, who Trump will succeed on Jan. 20 as U.S. head of state, have one thing in common: Both are indifferent to the future fate of the Middle Eastern inhabitants, including refugees and Palestinians. Trump, in particular, has shown an inclination to recognize even dictatorial authoritarians disdainful of liberalism as sovereign leaders as long as they represent the majority of people. Therefore, it was no coincidence that Syrian President Bashar Assad called Trump "a natural ally" in fighting terrorism.

I think the true nature of the business tycoon-turned president's appeal in the sphere of foreign affairs is the likelihood that he will show himself to be efficient in the "art" of making deals. His ability as leader of the world's most powerful country will be tested in his approach to the Syrian civil war. Russian President Vladimir Putin is expected to try to talk Trump into accepting a deal on Ukraine and Crimea if the U.S. leader wants to bring an end to the disastrous situation in Syria. The two leaders may determine to compromise on the issue of Syria in exchange for securing the interests of critical importance to each of them in relation to Ukraine and Israel.

Trump-Putin rapport?

Japan, for its part, will have to remain vigilant about the possibility that Washington and Moscow will strike a deal at the expense of Japan on issues related to locations that are far distant from this country. While Trump's real stance toward Japan remains unknown, it seems that Putin has already taken Trump's possible foreign policy cards into consideration.

Apparently because of this, the Russian leader showed a cautious attitude toward the Japanese demand for the return of the northern territories, seized from Japan by Soviet forces at the end of World War II, in his two days of talks with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in Nagato, Yamaguchi Prefecture, on Thursday and in Tokyo on Friday.

Putin always pursues Russian geopolitical supremacy in Eurasia. His success in intervening in the Syrian civil war and his efforts to relatively stabilize Russia's relations with Japan are signs that the Kremlin will bring further pressure on the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in its quest for such geopolitical supremacy by using the issue of Ukraine as a lever.

In mid-August, troops of the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) staged military exercises in the Pskov region bordering Estonia and Latvia to keep the EU and NATO in check. CSTO comprises the same countries that form the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). In June, Putin proposed that a Greater Eurasian Partnership be launched based on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) — which includes China and Russia — and the EEU with the participation of Iran as well.

I do not think Trump has a lofty strategic plan comparable to Putin's greater Eurasian strategy. The U.S. president-elect is expected to seek a simple deal — a deal in which Washington will cooperate with the Assad regime in trying to eliminate ISIL. If this is the case, Trump may agree to recognize the interests Assad, Russia and Iran have respectively obtained in Syria and, in return for that, have them guarantee the supremacy of the United States in Iraq — where U.S. soldiers shed blood in a war — and recognize Israel's "special" interests.

In his explanation to Americans as to why he is accepting Russia's positions vis-a-vis Ukraine and Syria, Trump is likely to emphasize that he would halt U.S. military involvement in the Middle East and, instead, use the money at home to prevent terrorism and create jobs.

Trump is not expected to be as keenly committed as his predecessors to maintaining the post-World War II security order in the world and strong bonds with U.S. allies. Should he choose to cut back on U.S. involvement and influence in the Middle East more than Obama, the region would lose the presence of major powers, such as the United States and European countries, as its "supervisors" for the first time in its contemporary history.

But the Middle East should not take this situation as a happy opportunity to go on its own. Rather, the region

should brace itself for a new round of tragedy characterized by a vacuum of power and the rise of anarchy.

Paradoxically speaking, Trump can be a U.S. president that ISIL and Al-Qaida will eventually find much better for them than Hillary Clinton. For their part, China and Russia have no will to spend the enormous amount of energy that the United States has spent in the post-Cold War period to cope with a variety of highly tricky situations across the region. Simply put, Beijing and Moscow have no intention to take over Washington's responsibility and leadership in the Middle East.

Japan as peaceful country

Given that Japan is arguably the most stable, prosperous and peaceful country in Eurasia, it makes sense for Russia to maintain its relations with Japan, a reliable country that helps keep China in check in the eastern part of the continent. When I gave a series of lectures in Britain, France, Germany and the Netherlands on a two-week tour in November, many in the audiences noted that, compared with the United States and Europe, Japan is markedly stable thanks to the presence of the Emperor, "the symbol of the state and of the unity of the people."

As such, what the Emperor told the nation in a video message on Aug. 8 should be interpreted in the context of world history and Eurasian politics. At the time, the Emperor said, "A major milestone year marking the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II has passed, and in two years we will be welcoming the 30th year of Heisei." The year 2018 also marks the 150th anniversary of the inception of the Meiji era.

In the coming two years of 2017-18, the nation is most likely to see the ongoing series of discussions on the Emperor's possible abdication coming to an epoch-making conclusion. As a member on the government-appointed panel of experts discussing the matter, I always bear in mind the need to keep the issue of the abdication from being tangled up with geopolitical turmoil that may happen in Eurasia due to the presence of the two quite distinctive politicians — Trump and Putin.

Fortunately, the wave of populism that is increasingly rampant in the United States, Europe and South Korea has not spread to the Japanese population. Nevertheless, the Japanese people may not be free from being emotionally disturbed by the ever-changing political dynamics in Eurasia and the Trump phenomenon. I believe that proceeding with level-headed discussions on the role of the Emperor as the symbol of the state and of the unity of the people will surely help the Japanese people better prepare for any major change in the international situation.

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Yamauchi is a professor at Meiji University and a professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo, where he used to head the University of Tokyo Center for Middle Eastern Studies (UTCMES). Concurrently, he serves as a member on the governmental panel of experts tasked with discussing measures to reduce the Emperor's burden of official duties.